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EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Buenos Aires, Argentina

September 13, 1978

OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Ms. Roberta Cohen (HA/HR)
Mr. James Bumpus (ARA/ECA)
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Roberta and Jim:

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s): NR

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to ☐

Date ☐ Declassify on ☐ Reason ☐

Detention Camps

The Department's request has opened up a rich vein of material here. We have a lot of information regarding interrogation and detention centers scattered throughout our files. I have been pulling it together, trying to develop a format to evaluate and present it sensibly. We are at over 50 facilities and still counting. This is a mucky area as our witnesses were blindfolded. The pattern is clear and the number much larger than I would have opined before I started mining files. I hope to have this out in the next week.

FOWG

The chill in our bilateral relations has produced a surge of cooperation from the FOWG. We are snowed under with several dozen replies to our information requests. As usual, there are no surprises. We are turning out the H pass cables like hotcakes on these sad cases. The Foreign Office probably wants to make sure that its responsiveness is not open to question by the Congress or Administration. The turn around is good, but the news is bad.

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Right of Option

Our Right of Option Program is still on dead center. As you can see from the attached graph the inputs and outputs of PEN cases swing erratically but the number of options granted stays at a low and steady level. Our Consulate's requests to meet several dozen Right of Option applicants have finally been turned down after months of being stalled. The MinInt cited a Foreign Office rule which allows Consular officials access only to their own nationals. I lunched with the Acting FOWG head yesterday. He promised to work out an exception to allow consular access in these option application cases. Meanwhile, we have learned that the Canadian, Danish, Swedish, Israeli, etc. have actually gotten in to see their option applicants. Please share this tidbit with Judy.

Embassy Card File

I trust you have by now received the copy of our Human Rights Card File. We will be folding in another 300 or so cases this weekend. It never ends or even slows down. Although operations are down, as time goes by, more of the "silent majority" cases come out in the open. Someone might try to work out a method by which the Embassy's Card File could be made available to the IACHR on a confidential basis. I believe that the file is the most comprehensive compilation on the Argentine Human Rights Record available.

EXIM Rejection and Derian Statement

The human rights organizations here are ecstatic over the EXIM decision and Patt's statement. They have all streamed into my office to express their pleasure and profound thanks. Unfortunately, I was out when the Embassy reaction cable was being drafted and the positive news did not get folded in.

The strong government and press reaction here is a complicated cocktail but its principal ingredients from the perspective of my desk are:

Dashed Expectations -- According to Thoreau, happiness is a matter of expectation. After the Argentines successfully staged and won the World Football Cup, the government, the press, the man in the street, all thought

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that Argentina had crossed an international bridge to respectability. EXIM and Derian were the first indications that their unresolved problems were still around.

Government's Weakness -- Although it is the government's practice to characterize publicly all human rights charges as attacks against Argentina and not the government or as a lack of understanding, it did not deflect these events. There was impact. For some reason, the events were characterized internally as an attack on the Videla-Viola government which is feeling very weak at the moment. Why the government decided to take, rather than slip, the punch is not clear. But it certainly served some internal purpose.

Guilt -- This was the first time in my recollection that we have mentioned the words "torture" and "summary execution" in public. This indication of what we really think (and know) touched the usually well hidden guilt complex among a number of the Argentine military. I had several incredible discussions as a result. I am becoming a confessor to both sides. The problem is that for many military leaders knowledge equates with accountability. The Derian statement questioned the military's belief that the law of forgetfulness will in time absolve them of responsibility. Their domestic and international campaign of plausible denial was shaken by a few accurate words.

Political Power and Human Rights

The last few weeks has seen a new air of gloom over the town. Everyone is dining out on Videla's loss of power; the inability of the government to deal with the issues at hand; the fact that the issues are getting worse. On top of this there is now a steady stream of war talk. The economic policy is being roundly attacked. We expect Massera to blast Dr. Joe's machinations before stepping down to civilian life. The Montes foreign policy moving from the West to the Non-Aligned and the East is viewed as military amateurism. Health care is deteriorating, the education policy is in shambles, there is no movement on the labor front. There are more and more cracks in the wall and more openness in discussing them.

In this heady atmosphere of political weakness the human rights organizations are opting for a tougher line.

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Videla's latest human rights statements in Rome are seen as a continuation of the government's refusal to deal with the issue. Videla even discovered another cause for disappearances -- people blowing themselves up with poorly made bombs.

From this desk, the issue posed is whether our strategy of trying to strengthen Videla-Viola, thereby giving them the political power to bring about reforms providing for the protection of the person should be re-examined in light of their growing weakness to govern. Although my futile dissent message encouraging the US Navy to massage Massera got no where, recent events have strengthened my view that we should start putting some of our money on the other horses in the race. Massera is everyone's (but this Embassy's) favorite dark horse.

EXIM Policy Reconsideration

There is some discussion here that EXIM might reconsider its lending policy towards Argentina, now that the Harkin Amendment is no longer hanging over its head. This would be a disaster for our human rights efforts here, unless it was coupled with some significant concrete action by the GOA. Softening of EXIM's policy would strengthen the hardliners, demonstrate that the Yankees are only really interested in making a buck, fortify the position of no concessions on human rights, and show we can be shouted down by the local Argentine press.

IACHR Visit

The word is out here in press circles of a Videla-Mondale deal to improve bilateral relations via some Argentine gestures on human rights. The deal is said to include extending an invitation to the IACHR to visit Argentina in exchange for US concessions. One press skeptic suggests that Videla is in an even worse power position now to deliver on his promises to Mondale than he was to deliver on his (still unfilled) promises to President Carter. We shall see. The IACHR visit is becoming here as it is in Asuncion and Montevideo the litmus test of our human rights policy.

Thank you both for your letters. I was pleased that Patt found the meeting with Ron Kelly useful. I

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hopefully will be dug out of the backlog by the end of the month.

Best regards,

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F. Allen Harris
First Secretary

cc: Ambassador

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